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ABSTRACT

This document describes a course in the teaching of reading for content-area teachers, which has been offered at Temple University since 1970. It was designed to help English, science, and social studies teachers meet state certification requirements in reading. The theoretical base of the course is psycholinguistic, with a major emphasis upon language, including dialects, and upon the relationship between reading and language. Students from all three subject areas meet together in one class and discussions demonstrate the cross-disciplinary nature of reading. Written reports and tutoring of a remedial student for two hours each week are required. Students are taught to assess readability and reading levels, to prepare directed reading activities for specific subjects, and to consider critical reading skills. Black English and other dialects are studied. Videotapes are used to film students in peer microteaching situations. Student evaluations indicate satisfaction with the course. (HKM)

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LANGUAGE AND READING SKILLS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

A New Course at Temple University (1970-present)

A Presentation at the 1976 Annual Meeting
of the Conference on English Education

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 10, 1976

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Language and Reading Skills in the Secondary School

This paper bears the title of a new reading course developed at Temple University since 1970 to meet Pennsylvania state certification requirements in Secondary Education. It is an action-oriented, skills-centered course, combining general theory, a variety of methods, techniques, and specific teaching applications in a number of in-class and outside activities. Although we try to touch all bases in reading instruction, however, briefly, the theoretical base of the course is psycholinguistic, with a major emphasis upon language, including divergent dialects -- Black English especially -- and upon reading as a language-based and language-related process.

In the late 1960s, the faculty of the Secondary Department, College of Education, decided to handle the state certification requirement in reading within our own Department. This decision required us to develop a new course to replace a traditional phonics and word-centered course in reading psychology. Mathematics and Foreign Language Education elected to incorporate reading into their own methods course; but Science and Social Studies Education asked the English Education faculty to develop a common course for their subject areas and English; I agreed to be the senior professor responsible for this project and have continued since 1970. For several years the course has been open to graduate students; four of them have completed doctoral dissertation research projects experimenting with the remedial tutorial program that each student administers in the public schools.[1]

Considering the complexity, breadth, and depth of the human activity known as reading, and its great importance to everyone, the task assigned to this introductory, one-semester course was, and remains, formidable. Huey, an early twentieth century psychologist, described reading as "the most striking

and important artificial activity to which the human race has ever been moulded."

> To completely analyze what we do when we read would be almost the acme of a psychologist's achievement for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance the civilization has learned in all its history.[2]

Obviously we cannot cope with all that is indicated in the paragraph above in a three-hour course. But the students do study these dimensions of reading, at least briefly, and they do consider the citation from Huey. For better or for worse, three hours is our slice of the pie, and we try to make the most of it; without doubt, this is one of the most demanding courses in the University. A student completes requirements for an A, B, or D contract, in which quality counts as much as quantity. The course work includes the following activities:

> individual tutoring in the schools using a programed text, with preliminary and final written reports on the experience; pair and small-group practice on the tutorial program in class;
>
> preparation of three synthesizing expository papers based on critical analytical reading of assigned sources in three major-areas--reading theory, Black English, and critical reading; each paper is prepared through a sequence of activities that includes outside reading, a short quiz followed by in-class small-group discussions of the topic, then outside writing;
>
> preparation of up to three directed-reading-thinking activities (DRTAs), which are specially focused lesson plans submitted in writing and presented live in peer microteaching groups; these presentations are videotaped for peer criticism and later private viewing by each student for a written report;
>
> and toward the end of the semester, students going for the A contract present special projects developed in consultation with the staff.

The C contract requires seven papers; the B, nine, and the A, ten, differing

in degree of difficulty and amount of time required. The last paper is an ungraded self-evaluation of the student's experiences in the course, for his own benefit and the edification of the teacher; the student's self-evaluation is often a more meaningful course evaluation than a student-teacher confrontation type of evaluation.

At first the course was taught by a three-teacher team, one teacher for each of the three content areas: English, Science, and Social Education. Now each class of up to 35 students is the responsibility of one faculty member who may be assisted by a teaching associate. Students from the three subject areas mingle in whole-class and small-group discussions; experience shows that this mingling of professional interests helps all students understand that reading is not the concern of a single discipline or specialty, but of all teachers in all subject areas. The former subdivision of large classes into three subject area groups tended to perpetuate if not increase the provincialism of the separate disciplines. Working in small discussion groups of students from three subject areas generates greater interest and involvement, and more active learning than any other classroom procedure in my experience. Such discussions are scheduled to occur one week before each major written assignment is due; they are working sessions, stages on the way to completion of work outside of class.

To support our teaching-learning objectives, we use the following audio-visual equipment.

Telins: a telephone service which continuously plays one 30-minute tape on Black English each weekend for five weeks 4:30 p.m. Friday through 8:30 a.m. Monday.[3]

Tape cassette player -- in the Instructional Materials Center for playing a set of the Black English tapes provided for students unable to use Telins

Record Player -- for playing records demonstrating American English regional dialects[4]

Videotape camera -- for filming students in peer microteaching situations

Videotape player -- for showing tapes of various tutorial situations in the classroom; and in the Instructional Material Center, for student viewing of videotapes made in class

The course uses two textbooks, Aspects of Reading,[5] a collection of articles; and Reading by Patterns,[6] a consumable psycholinguistic programed book for the in-school remedial tutorial experience. A great variety of handouts is distributed: a detailed syllabus; statements of course objectives, policies, and procedures; and topics to be explored and questions to be raised in the course; reprints of articles; guidelines for general as well as specific assignments; descriptions and samples of procedures. Many of these materials are introduced to the whole class, studied outside, and discussed in small groups with reports back to the whole class when feasible.

All course assignments and activities are designed to help the students become self-starters; once started, we hope they will keep going. In addition to the topics and general activities discussed so far, the course provides study, discussion, and often practice in such areas as the following: history of past practice and theory in the teaching of reading;[7] current reading theories; Black English and reading; regional dialects; critical reading; readability levels; word analysis; sentence patterns; the informal group inventory; basal readers; individualized reading, the language experience approach; the cloze procedure; videotapes of a number of tutorial situations. Some of these are presented once in class, discussed for questions and information, and not pursued further; others, especially those requiring written reports or demonstrations, receive more time and attention. Finally, time

is set aside at nearly every class meeting for discussion of any general or specific questions students may have.

To provide a sharper focus on the organization and conduct of the course, the remainder of this report is organized according to nine competency and performance based objectives that we have developed.

1. Students will become aware of the interdisciplinary nature of reading instruction in all content areas, with special reference to English, Science, and Social Studies.

Reading is not regarded in and of itself as a "subject." Assigned readings and class discussions increase the students' awareness of the interrelationships of language, thought, and emotion with the communication skills of speaking, listening, writing and reading. The tutorial program and the required papers have the potential of making the interdisciplinary nature of reading a realizeable concept, capable of classroom implementation. Small and large group discussions by students in English, Science, and Social Studies Education clearly demonstrate the cross-disciplinary nature of reading.

2. Students will become aware of the implications of differing theories of reading instruction in the content areas.

Through assigned readings, discussion, and the writing of an analytical, synthesizing paper, students study the traditional word-centered phonics approach to reading as exemplified in basal readers and most remedial materials--the hierarchy of skills approach--in contrast to an approach that focuses main attention on sentences, order of sentence parts, and intonation, and on the ways sentences are interdependent and interrelated in paragraphs and longer passages. Many if not all the projects and activities provide opportunities for the students to observe theoretical positions reflected in practical methods and materials. Several assignments require the students to

work in their content specialties; small-group discussions require them to observe applications in their own area and two others.

3. Students will become aware of the nature and importance of critical reading in the content areas.

Critical reading is required of all students to enable them to hold discussions with their peers and to write papers based upon assigned readings and upon listening (Black English tapes). Many students improve their critical reading ability during the course and transfer this skill to study in other courses. A major analytical and synthesizing report deals with critical reading; one of the DRTAs incorporates critical reading as a main objective. Even the tutorial program requires critical reading for both tutor and tutee, a point that is highlighted and discussed in class. The commonality of critical reading across all content areas thus becomes obvious to the students.

4. Students will become aware of the nature and structure of non-standard dialects with special reference to Black English in relation to reading instruction in the content area.

Over a period of several weeks, along with other topics, students study Black English as it affects and is affected by the English and language arts program, and how it may interfere with reading instruction and learning to read. At intervals of one week, they listen to five thirty-minute tapes on Negro Non-Standard Dialect, and finally read two published articles. After quizzes on the taped lectures and the other source materials, they discuss the subject in small groups in preparation for a major analytical synthesizing report on their sources; each report concludes with the student's views on how he can apply his new knowledge and insight in his own teaching in his subject.

5. Students will demonstrate their competency in reading instruction in the content areas by tutoring an individual student throughout the course.

The tutorial experience, a minimum of two hours each week throughout the semester, is a major affective and cognitive component of the course. Students are provided with a unique consumable psycholinguistic remedial programed book, designed for students in grades 7-12 whose test scores place them below grade 5 in reading ability. Placements are made on a one-to-one basis in cooperating schools; in addition to their regular visits for tutoring, the students write a preliminary report and a final evaluation of the tutorial experience. For the first and perhaps only time in their lives, these young teachers spend a considerable amount of time in a close, one-to-one relationship with a student who needs help that the tutorial program enables them to give. The program is supplemented by other books, newspapers, and magazines, at the discretion of the tutor.

6. Students will learn to prepare Directed Reading Thinking Activity plans in the content areas and demonstrate them by peer microteaching.

Three DRTAs are required of all students, and students going for the A contract may devise a special project incorporating several to be presented at the end of the semester. The DRTA is a specialized teaching plan that places maximum emphasis upon (1) getting the class ready to read before reading and (2) developing student-centered rather than teacher-centered activities. The first DRTA, early in the course, focuses on reading readiness and student centeredness; the second incorporates critical reading; and the third incorporates a cloze procedure. These are written in outline form and submitted for evaluation.

Each student must present at least one DRTA for videotaping; his peers comment on his performance, using as a guide the form prepared by the

teaching staff, and later he views his tape in the Instructional materials center and writes a report to hand in.

Students keep these teaching plans and use them later in student teaching or in their own classrooms when they are placed in schools. They provide a handy kit of usable teaching plans.

7. Students will develop and demonstrate competencies in using informal reading inventories; assessing readability levels; using cloze procedure tasks; applying word analysis techniques and knowledge of sentence structure to reading problems in the content areas.

Of the foregoing procedures, the cloze procedure is required in one DRTA; word analysis techniques and knowledge of sentence structure may be use in all three required DRTAs. Students are prepared to use these techniques by distribution of handouts, outside study, and class discussions. Informal reading inventories and plans for assessing readability levels may be used as final projects by a same students, but they do not receive much emphasis generally in the course.

8. Students will also demonstrate many of these learnings and competencies by writing critical papers analyzing and explaining them.

Perhaps the previous sections of this paper have amply described the three major analytical, synthesizing papers on reading theories, Black English, and critical reading, along with the reports and DRTAs, to explain this objective.

9. Students will also develop their understanding of the nature of reading in the content areas through small and large group discussions as regular procedures throughout the course.

It cannot be overemphasized that small-group as well as large group discussions that involve students from three subject areas, constantly

reinforce the concept that reading, far from being a separate or isolated "subject", is an integral component of high quality professional teaching in all context areas.

In the Spring Semester, 1973, a state Department of Education team wrote the following evaluation:

> The reading course designed for Science, English and Social Studies teachers is a giant step in the right direction. It is an imaginative, action based program.[8]

Subsequently in the Fall Semester, 1975, and in the current semester, 1976, the Pennsylvania STATE DPE and NCATE teams, respectively, also spoke quite favorably about the course in their oral comments to us personally during their visits.

Earlier in this paper, it was indicated that each student writes an ungraded self-evaluation; this report helps him to see his work in perspective, and it also helps the faculty evaluate the course. Since over one thousand such reports have been written, a complete analysis of them is out of the question. Instead, the following single student self-evaluation is offered in conclusion as a fairly representative illustration.

> This course benefited my cognitive and affective development in many ways. It increased my awareness of deficiencies in my writing; improvement resulted from doing a great deal of writing, and receiving a careful examination of my work, which was highly conducive to development of my own critical faculties.
>
> The content of the course was well chosen for my particular needs. Majoring in Social Studies Education, I could have overlooked the importance of reading to the entire process of education. Specifically, the areas of greatest importance to my development were:
>
> 1. The presentation of modern arguments against the "simplistic word approach" to learning, and the awareness that we, as teachers, should understand the most effective methods of transmitting knowledge to students in the teaching of reading.

2. The exploration of Black English was especially enlightening. I acquired an appreciation of the vitality of Black English as a complete language; and I became aware of the problems of interference, arising out of the conflict between Black English and Standard English.

3. After studying the articles and tapes, I began to understand the special problems of the printed (or written) word, consistent graphic representation of the language-words functioning under special rules and relationships.

4. The readings and the paper on critical reading impressed me far more than I expected. I will never again look at a sentence or passage in the same unenlightened manner.

5. The DRTA represents a concrete tool for use in organizing a lesson plan, in order to explore the nuances of reading. I'm afraid I was still so involved with my personal growth that may DRTAs consistently proved to be too teacher-directed.

Another important aspect of my personal developments was the experience I gained from interaction with my fellow students, via the group activity. But by far the most meaningful affective experience was the tutorial assignment. This one-to-one relationship with an inner-city student having reading difficulties became a real eye-opener. Further, the opportunity to teach reading helped make me aware of the complexities involved in what teachers too often take for granted--reading. I also feel that I helped my pupil, through the program and additional readings, to develop an interest in reading and in improving his skills on his own.

Each semester, the number of reports we received of this caliber meke us believe we must be doing something right.

A much more detailed, comprehensive self-evaluation is included as Appendix A.

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Self-Evaluation: Views on Teaching and Learning of Reading

Sec. Ed. 371. Language and Reading Skills in the Secondary School--Dr. Carl Lefevre

The course has been extremely helpful in:

1. highlighting problems in teaching and learning of reading

2. providing an introduction to the literature of the teaching of reading

3. providing techniques and opportunities to prepare and use materials in the techniques (micro-teaching, directed-reading-thinking activities, Cloze procedures)

4. allowing interaction between students in the same general area of teaching (small group-subject group) as well as in class discussion

5 providing an introduction to the study of English language (sentence patterns)

6. allowing a consideration of non-standard Black dialect as a factor in language and reading problems in the secondary schools, without the making of prejudicial value judgments, by demonstration of Black dialect as an internally-consistent system of verbal communication, but at the same time demonstrating the features which cause interference in reading and learning standard English.

7. providing direct evidence of language and reading problems through the one-to-one experience of the tutorial

8. providing direct experience in the tutorial with one segment of a total reading program

Since the topics mentioned above have been treated in some detail in segments prepared for this course, the following overview will be presented in outline form:

1. The course has demonstrated that reading is not a mechanical process of learning to transcribe printing into sound, but rather is a language-related communication process in which graphemes are used to convey meaning from author to reader. In this communication process the primary meaning-bearing unit is the sentence.

2. In the study of non-standard Black dialect the learning and reading problems of all dialect speakers were identified. The problems may perhaps be divided as follows:

   a. All dialects differ from printed standard English and all people are speakers of dialect. The degree of difference may be some guide to anticipation of the magnitude of learning and reading problems in standard English.

   b. All dialects are internally-consistent self-contained communication systems.

c. All communication systems are adequate for the social group in which they are used. This makes for particular difficulty in trying to teach a closely related dialect or standard form since the utility of new system is less than that of the system used by the student.

d. All communication system reflect the needs of the culture in which they are used. Thus all communication systems contain ideas and concepts based on cultural experiences which are not contained in other communication systems. In order to by-pass the psychologically explosive quantitative evaluation of the concept content of various English dialects, let me point out that initially English was very poor in concepts describing emotional states and has borrowed heavily from French and to a lesser extent German in order to remove this deficiency. In a like manner nearly every language has borrowed heavily from English for technical words and concepts. This borrowing seems to occur whenever cultures are in contact.

The implication here is that as speakers of minority dialects contact speakers of majority dialects, there will be a mutual exchange of words and concepts, as can already be seen in the adoption of many words and accompanying concepts from non-standard Black dialect into middle-class English, particularly into teen-age English. This observation supports the need for a dialectically integrated school system.

3. In technical America, the most important skill is reading, since it is the foundation for much learning and is a skill necessary for good citizenship and most work opportunities. Many techniques have been tried in the past, each successful with some but not all students. Since there has been no comprehensive, ongoing study of reading, there is no scientifically validated total reading program. Some of the necessary features of such a total program, however, have been identified and discussed in a previous assignment.

4. Techniques and opportunities for teaching provided in the course have demonstrated to me that solving reading and associated learning problems is the function of all teachers and that even science teachers can make a positive contribution by correctly structuring study and examination materials.

5. Techniques for testing and evaluating student skills and abilities in reading course assignments have been most helpful and I have used these with classes.

6. Techniques for improving reading comprehension by showing students how to attack the problem of obtaining information from text book assignments have been used, to the amazement of my college students, most of whom apparently were never given the techniques explicitly. This indicates need for better communication at the secondary school level.

7. If I may be permitted a personal observation, one of the apparent problems in reading seems to stem from (1) reading requires active participation by the reader to extract meaning from symbols; as more communication becomes passive.

(TV) this requirement becomes an unfamiliar hardship. (2) The high density of information contained in writing and the high speed with which a good reader can acquire information again makes demands for the development of a skill which can only be obtained by constant practice.

Let me add my personal thanks for having the experience of this course and for the many insights and techniques it has provided.